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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

18 May 1951

SUBJECT: TERMS OF REFERENCE: NIE-37: LIKELIHOOD OF A  
SOVIET ATTACK ON JAPAN (1st Draft for Board  
consideration)

THE PROBLEM

To assess the likelihood of a Soviet attack on Japan  
during 1951.

ASSUMPTION

That Soviet and US forces in the Far East at present  
will remain roughly the same for the remainder of 1951.

PART ONE: SOVIET CAPABILITIES FOR INVADING JAPAN

We believe that in assessing the likelihood of Soviet  
invasion of Japan, we must take into consideration the USSR's  
own probable evaluation of its capabilities for successful

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invasion. Therefore a realistic examination of probable Soviet capabilities must give due consideration to the probable opposition from the US forces which the USSR knows are available or can be made available during 1951.

I. WHAT COMMUNIST FORCES ARE AVAILABLE?

A. What is Soviet strength in the Far East?

1. Order of battle (at divisional level), location, and combat effectiveness of ground forces?
2. Strength and disposition of naval forces, merchant fleet, and auxiliary forces? Capacity of merchant shipping?
3. Order of battle of air forces and air facilities?

B. What portion of the above forces would be available for invasion of Japan in 1951, giving due consideration to Soviet needs elsewhere in the Far East? In view of the necessity of defending key strategic and industrial areas in the Far Eastern USSR, supporting Communist China, garrisoning Dairen, etc., the USSR obviously could make available only a portion of its overall strength.

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C. What other Communist forces might be available?

How firm do we consider the reported existence of Japanese PW troops? Would they be sufficiently reliable to be used? Could any Chinese Communists be used while the Korean campaign was on? In any case, would the USSR either need Chinese ground forces or consider it politically desirable to use such forces?

II. WHAT ARE THE CAPABILITIES OF THE ABOVE FORCES, ASSUMING US OPPOSITION?

- A. What are Soviet ground force capabilities for amphibious and airborne seizure of a firm lodgment area(s) in Japan?
- B. Would Soviet naval forces be able to (1) secure the contiguous waters around the invasion area; (2) screen a landing; and (3) protect the lines of communication?
- C. Could the Soviet air forces achieve and maintain local air superiority over the beachhead, interdict the land and sea approaches, and protect Soviet staging bases, and lines of communication? Since this would probably be a critical factor in

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a Soviet decision, such factors as air facilities, sortie rates, and combat effectiveness might be analyzed in detail.

- D. What are Soviet capabilities, in terms of amphibious and airborne lift, for mounting and maintaining an amphibious operation of the size indicated above? How would the USSR logistically supply and resupply an invasion force, especially with POL? Are Soviet Far Eastern stockpiles adequate for the purpose and for how long? How much Soviet shipping will be necessary, with due allowance for attrition?

III. OTHER FACTORS BEARING ON SOVIET CAPABILITIES?

- A. Where and how could Soviet forces invade Japan? What is the most probable invasion pattern (a) assuming the US still holds South Korea; (b) assuming US loss of Korea? Would not the overriding necessity for land-based air cover almost require invasion from the North?
- B. What landing beaches and ports could the Soviets seize initially in order to bring in the bulk of the assault forces? Are these adequate?

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- C. How would the poor weather, especially around Hokkaido, affect invasion prospects? When would be the best time of year to invade?
- D. Could the USSR expect to achieve tactical surprise? How much warning might the US expect to achieve and how might this affect Soviet capabilities?
- E. Would the USSR estimate that possible diversions, such as a simultaneous Chinese Communist threat to or invasion of Formosa or Hong Kong, would split US air and naval forces? Might a simultaneous offensive in Korea be expected to pin down the Eighth Army and hamper reinforcement of Japan?
- F. Would the majority of Japanese actively support the US forces? How would this affect Soviet capabilities? How significant an increment to Soviet capabilities would be Japanese Communist subversive, sabotage, and guerrilla activities?

IV. COULD THE USSR SUCCESSFULLY MAINTAIN AND EXPAND ITS INITIAL LODGEMENT IN JAPAN?

We consider this a crucial question on which any Soviet estimate might well turn. Assuming the Soviet forces

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could seize a substantial beachhead, could they expand it and occupy the remainder of Japan?

- A. How vulnerable are the long Soviet overland and seaborne supply lines, including the Trans-Siberian, to US interdiction following an invasion?
- B. Could the Soviet forces expect to maintain themselves logistically in the face of probably increasing US surface and submarine attacks, carrier strikes, and other air attacks on invasion shipping, key ports, and rail lines, perhaps including use of atomic bombs?
- C. Could the USSR expect to build up decisive strength in the beachhead faster than a US defensive build-up, including forces withdrawn from Korea? Assuming the capture of Hokkaido, could the forces on Hokkaido then be expected to invade Honshu successfully?
- D. Does the terrain, especially in Hokkaido and Northern Honshu, favor the invader? Are there defensive bottlenecks which would facilitate the defense of Honshu in particular against invasion from the North?

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V. HOW DOES THE KOREAN CAMPAIGN AFFECT SOVIET CAPABILITIES?

To what extent does US involvement in Korea make it more feasible for the USSR to invade Japan? On the other hand, to what extent would Communist seizure of Korea facilitate invasion of Japan? Would it make possible a two-pronged invasion from Korea as well as the North?

VI. CONSIDERING THE ABOVE FACTORS, HOW WOULD THE USSR ESTIMATE ITS CAPABILITIES TO INVADE AND OCCUPY JAPAN?

What portions of Japan might the USSR estimate it could successfully seize and hold; Hokkaido alone, Hokkaido plus northern Honshu, all of Japan, etc.?

PART TWO: PROBABLE SOVIET INTENTIONS

VII. WHAT ARE SOVIET OBJECTIVES RE JAPAN?

How does Japan fit into overall Soviet strategy in the Far East? How important is control or neutralization of Japan to the USSR? To what extent does the Kremlin fear Japanese rearmament in alliance with the US? To what extent might the USSR hope to utilize Japan itself, militarily and economically?

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VIII. TO WHAT EXTENT MIGHT THE USSR HOPE TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVES BY MEANS SHORT OF EARLY INVASION?

Obviously the USSR seeks to pose a continuing threat to Japan. Could the USSR expect by threats, subversion, propaganda, etc. to: (1) achieve first a neutral and then a Soviet-dominated Japan; or (2) sufficiently soften Japan for attack subsequent to 1951? Might the USSR expect the US to eventually pull out of Japan, leaving it more exposed to Soviet attack?

IX. WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE -- PRO AND CON -- RE SOVIET INTENTIONS TO INVADE JAPAN IN 1951?

To what extent do Soviet Far Eastern preparations appear defensive rather than offensive and vice versa? To what extent do these preparations appear geared to a 1951 invasion, as opposed to later?

X. WHAT IS THE PROBABLE SOVIET ESTIMATE OF THE US AND WESTERN REACTION TO SOVIET INVASION OF JAPAN?

- A. Would the USSR estimate that it could invade Japan without gravely risking a global war?  
Would it estimate that the US would seek to confine hostilities to the Far East?
- B. Even if willing to accept the risk of war with the US, would the USSR estimate that it could

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split the US from its Allies? However, might not such a development, if the USSR did not attack Western Europe, actually be favorable to the US?

- C. Would the USSR estimate that the US would make an all-out effort to hold Japan, including deployment of large naval and ground forces, and strategic air attacks, including atomic bombing, at least on Soviet Siberia?
- D. What would be the political and psychological advantage and disadvantages of a Soviet invasion in 1951?

XI. IF THE USSR ESTIMATED THAT IT COULD NOT SEIZE ALL OF JAPAN, BUT ONLY THE NORTHERN PORTION, HOW WOULD THIS AFFECT SOVIET INTENTIONS?

XII. WHAT NEW DEVELOPMENTS MIGHT SERIOUSLY AFFECT SOVIET INTENTIONS?

- A. Would the USSR probably invade Japan in event of general war beginning elsewhere in 1951?  
In this event how would a reduction in US forces in the FE affect Soviet intentions?
- B. What would be the effect of accelerated Japanese rearmament on Soviet intentions?

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- C. What would be the effect on Soviet intentions of a US disaster in Korea?
- D. What would be the effect on Soviet intentions re-Japan if the US widened the scope of the Korean war by attacking Communist China?
- E. How would Soviet intentions be affected by a reduction of US forces in the Far East, presumably following a de facto or negotiated restoration of the status quo in Korea?

### XIII. CONCLUSIONS

- A. In the light of (1) the probable Soviet estimate of their own capabilities; (2) the probable Soviet estimate of the situation resulting from an attack on Japan; and (3) overall Soviet intentions globally as well as in the Far East, what is the likelihood of a Soviet invasion of Japan in 1951?
- B. What new developments might cause a major change in Soviet intentions?

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